



Holidays on Ice

David Sedaris

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David Sedaris's beloved holiday collection is new again with six more pieces, including a never before published story. Along with such favorites as the diaries of a Macy's elf and the annals of two very competitive families, are Sedaris's tales of tardy trick-or-treaters (*Us and Them*); the difficulties of explaining the Easter Bunny to the French (*Jesus Shaves*); what to do when you've been locked out in a snowstorm (*Let It Snow*); the puzzling Christmas traditions of other nations (*Six to Eight Black Men*); what Halloween at the medical examiner's looks like (*The Monster Mash*); and a barnyard secret Santa scheme gone awry (*Cow and Turkey*).

Holidays on Ice Details

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Author : David Sedaris

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JSou says

I always get David Sedaris and Dave Eggers confused for some reason. Until now, I've never read anything by either of them, but I can't remember who it is that everyone seems to hate. Sedaris? Eggers? Both? I had planned to read this a year ago, but forgot I had it. I thought I'd better read it now during the holidays so I wouldn't have to wait another year to get to it--I can never watch Christmas movies or read holiday stories when it's not Christmas; it's depressing.

Anyway, this was a perfect little book to read during all the holiday chaos while suffering from a near-mental breakdown. (Mental breakdown caused by the mom freakout that happens every once in awhile when you realize there are actual *lives* depending on you, and you don't even know how that happened, or have a fucking clue what you're doing, and are scared someone is going to find you out, and are a little puzzled that they haven't already, and you just go to bed to cry into your pillow. You know, *that* old chestnut.) It's a quick read, funny, and made me feel a little better knowing that I at least don't have to make a living handing out leaflets dressed in a taco costume. Working as a Christmas Elf would be kind of fun, though. Well, just for like a day. The first story was my favorite, and I was grateful for the laughs instead of the above-stated tears. There's a blurb for ya.

"A great alternative to sobbing yourself to sleep!"

-J. Soutas, author of this really bad, whiny review

So really, thank you ~~Dave Eggers~~ David Sedaris, I like you.

Alison says

I'm afraid my book-selection privileges will be revoked by my book club for choosing this one.

I enjoy David Sedaris, in part because of his constant vigilance for finding the worst in people. Exploring the darker side of man makes for funny personal essays.

But when he turns to fiction, he has absolute creative control over his subjects. Instead of reporting on someone's shortcomings, he's inventing them. Perhaps this power is too much - he can't seem to help but create the worst imaginable scenario. He has some funny premises, like a fake holiday letter and a game of benevolent brinksmanship between wealthy neighbors. But each of his "fiction" stories devolves from amusing and odd to troubling and grotesque.

My advice is to pick this book up at a book store or library and read this first piece, Santaland Diaries, about his time as an elf at Macy's. That's classic Sedaris and worth reading. Then put it back on the shelf and walk away - the rest is not worth it.

Jason says

I feel weird reviewing this book right now because the honest truth is: I really genuinely did not like it. And yet I've been called out recently by a bunch of helpful strangers on Goodreads for not liking their favorite books—this asshole telling me I should avoid all literary fiction, this one here saying that my problem is with fiction in general—and I fear I'm going to develop a reputation for hating books, and then Otis will kick me off Goodreads and all the mean girls in the Feedback Group will cheer and the only people who will care are the one hundred sixty-four people in my friends list, but then a huge chunk of those people are real-life friends who have only ever logged into Goodreads once, so in the end there are about five people who will care. Maybe six.

And that's not to mention some of these other pressing fears a reviewer has to deal with: what if I rate too many books lowly (will people think I'm just trying to stir the pot and call negative attention to myself?), or what if I rate too many books highly (will people think I'm indiscriminate about which books are my favorites and therefore consider me unreliable?). I suppose there's also the potential for too many mediocre reviews, and I guess that's the guy whom everybody thinks can't make up his freaking mind.

In the end, I'm going to just opt for honesty. I disliked this David Sedaris book. I have never read a David Sedaris book before but I understand him to be a very popular comedian and I usually enjoy very popular comedians. Except this book isn't funny. The initial story around which the entire collection is based, "SantaLand Diaries," is about Sedaris's stint as a Christmas elf at a Macy's department store. The observations of his boss, of the other elves, of parents and children waiting to see Santa, and of the other shoppers are pretty standard fare—there is nothing particularly noteworthy about his comments that made me laugh or even raise an eyebrow in amusement. Of his other stories, there is really only one that is mildly memorable; the rest rely heavily on shock value which is not something that can successfully stand on its own in my opinion. Having said that, I don't know that I will give up on Sedaris altogether. This book seems sort of thrown together, most of the stories not relating to anything in particular, whether to each other or to any unified theme, but I would expect some of his other collections to have better focus, and I will retain his other books in my "to read" list based on that expectation.

Sarah says

This book gets one star instead of zero because I did not completely hate "Dinah the Christmas Whore" and thought "SantaLand Diaries" was just kind of okay. I didn't like any of the other stories even the slightest bit.

Kelly (and the Book Boar) says

Find all of my reviews at: <http://52bookminimum.blogspot.com/>

If you follow my reading, you're probably wondering what the hell could have happened to make me rate a Sedaris selection less than every Star. Well, lemme tell ya.

Although I was aware that this is a collection of items pulled from other Sedaris books, many may not so it will appear to be a money grab . . . which it totally is. I don't really care, though, since (1) I got it from the library so it cost me zero dollars and (2) David Sedaris could take a dump on paper, bind it up, and I'd still

buy a copy so I could really give a rip whether this was material I was already familiar with.

I put a hold on the audio version of *Holidays On Ice* in order to hopefully keep me in the Christmas spirit. You see, usually around the week before Thanksgiving I look a little something like this

I want to put Christmas trees in every room of the house and bake and place myself firmly on The Good List. But then December rolls around and I am faced with the daunting task of shopping combined with the busiest time of year at work and I completely lose my mojo and just want to hibernate until the new year. I thought listening to David would at least help me fake it 'til I make it à la Clark Griswold

And for the most part it did. David's tales of his experiences as a "Little Elf" in the "Santaland Diaries" are not to be missed, and the ever present "Six to Eight Black Men" never gets less funny. The problem this time was the inclusion of some fictional shorts in addition to the riotous autobiographical entries. To be fair, even some of them *started out* funny. Sadly, it seems David doesn't know when to stop when it comes to fictional works and takes the joke to the point of it being the literary equivalent of a beaten dead horse. Still, those "meh" selections can easily be skipped so you can get to the real gems like those mentioned above, or another favorite of mine: Jesus Shaves. You can read that essay for free [HERE](#) or take a listen/look [HERE](#).

Vanessa says

Just the kind of book to get me into the spirit of Christmas (no sarcasm intended).

Shannon says

There were only three stories in this collection that I didn't absolutely despise; Santaland Diaries, Dinah the Christmas Whore, and 6 to 8 Black Men were the only ones that were even remotely funny. The rest I honestly wish I had never read. I'd suggest reading these in the store or borrowing the book from the library if you really want to read it. Don't waste your money on this collection, especially the hardcover version, unless you really want to spend money on stories about a baby killed in a washing machine, a husband and wife giving away their two 10 year-old sons to a homeless man to one-up their neighbor by being the most charitable, and eyeballs kept in baby food jars.

I think Sedaris thought he was being clever with these stories but really they were just sad and unfunny.

thefourthvine says

Okay. Let it be said: "Santaland Diaries," the first essay of this book, is wonderful. But the rest of the book is basically filler; this was before Sedaris found his niche (humor essayist), and it *really* shows. He should never, ever write fiction, for example, and yet he tries to here. The results are not pretty, or even very

readable.

It's also notable that half of the pieces in this short book have appeared in other collections of his. So, really, this is not worth buying; get "Santaland Diaries" some other way, and regret nothing about missing the rest of this collection.

Annie says

To the tune of "Frosty the Snowman"

Da-vid Se-daris
Was a writer oh-so-droll
With a quirky style and take on life
That will put you on the floor.

Da-vid Se-daris
Writes the weirdest stuff you'll see
About the Christmas whore and the Macy's elves
And deathly children's pageantry.

There must have been some crazy
In the Sedaris family tree
'Cause David ain't the only one
Have you seen his sister Amy?

Oh! Da-vid Se-daris!
Can your stories all be true?
It matters not when you write as hot
As in Holidays on Ice!

Rebecca Renner says

"SantaLand Diaries" is my favorite Sedaris story, bar none. And it's perfect for this time of year! Ah, refreshing cynicism.

cassarooni says

In 2004 I was in a relationship where partner and I had very different ideas of what the holidays should look like. He's all about family and one-up-manship in the category of who brought the most unique/popular gift and who created the best dish for the potluck end of the Christmas meal.

Me, I'd rather vacate. So I packed up the dog this one year and drove to a secret get-away for Christmas alone. (Think "ahhh," not "awww") His gift to me was this book on CD, which I listened to during the 3 hour drive to my holiday sanctuary. I laughed so hard that I have to say, this was among my BEST holidays EVER.

Now it's a tradition for me. Long road trip over Christmas to the get-away destination and Holidays On Ice in the CD player.

whichwaydidshego? says

After reading the first short story, I thought this was going to be a delightful book. "SantaLand Diaries," after all, had me rolling down the aisle of the plane on which I was reading it... Okay, I was just giggling constantly with frequent bursts of loud laughter interspersed. No rolling, but still very humiliating on the whole. At any rate, I came home in a dither to read the other stories as well. Ugh. Appalling. Not a single chuckle among them. Worse, they were gross, often offensive (and I don't get offended!), and even horrific at times. It was beyond black humor, to just being black... dark, dismal, disgusting. No humor there. I was most sincerely disappointed.

The only other story that had even the slightest bit of resonance was "Dinah, The Christmas Whore," and that was likely because it was also written from a personal experience. Sedaris, in this girl's opinion, should stay very far away from writing fiction. Can you say "smug?" That's what I kept feeling about the author when suffering through the fiction stories. I gave this two stars only for "Santaland Diaries" - otherwise it'd be a solid one (for lack of a worse ranking).

Jenny (Reading Envy) says

This is a reread for me, although this version has a few more new stories.

Sedaris's version of the holidays is a comfort in a world saturated with sentimentality during Christmas. He pushes the limits, and hearing it in his voice is the way to go.

"The Santaland Diaries" feels like the greatest classic, about being a seasonal Macy's elf.

"Six to Eight Black Men" was my favorite this time around, about how Christmas traditions are different in Holland, and how political correctness tends to alter those traditions over time (necessarily, I'd add, yikes!)

This audiobook also includes one story recorded live, and that's the best experience. Stories are fine with perfectly produced rounded music intros, but it is the audience that really provides the energy.

fortuna.spinning says

All of these stories are pretty funny, but "Six to Eight Black Men" had me belly laughing in public. It never gets old.

This was my third timing reading this, but the first time on audio. As with most, maybe all, of his books, hearing him read the stories kicks it up a notch.

TK421 says

So it might be a little cruel of me to review a book about Christmas when Christmas is off most of our radars, but, hey, there's still snow on the ground where I live so I'm allowing myself this review.

Like most people, I have often laughed at the strange humor David Sedaris illuminates in his past books, Naked being the funniest, IMO. When I was given a copy of HOLIDAYS ON ICE I knew what I was about to get into, so it sat on my shelves for a few months. On a whim, I plucked it from the mass of unread books of mine and flipped to the front page. There was an inscription: For Lindsay in Japan, Christmas 2000 Love, Mom and Dad. For some reason I found this hilarious. I guess I never saw HOLIDAYS ON ICE as a book to give someone for Christmas; it is the type of book that is better gotten at a used bookstore or through a Secret Santa that is the workplace scrooge. Giving this to a loved one thousands of miles away struck a chord with me.

I proceeded to read The SantaLand Diaries and almost fell off my chair a few times because I was laughing so hard. Water came out my nose once. I think we've all been in a situation during the holidays where we needed some extra cash. I've had the pleasure of working three or four holiday jobs, mostly at warehouses or with UPS. I've never thought about becoming one of the unlucky ones to actually work as a department store Santa or as one of his minions. And after reading this humorous essay, I am inclined to say that I am going to push this opportunity onto my children when they come of age. Not because I don't love them, I do. I just want them to experience what it is like to work this type of job.

The other really good essay is Season's Greetings to Our Friends and Family!!! Sedaris nails the parody of Christmas newsletters perfectly. I would love to receive a letter like this one. Instead, I will most likely continue to receive the banal information of my friends and family: Little Billy is doing this; we redecorated our pantry; Joe sure likes college. I want something more. I want: Helen has finally beaten her meth addiction; Gary finally decided to start paying that overdue child support. I want real life. I want the details of what the year was really like. If I wanted Hallmark, I'd buy a card.

Sure these essays and stories are misanthropic and sometimes coarse, filled with crude humor and bleak holiday cheer, but they are funny. And funny is never out of season.

Oh, by the way, Lindsay, who was in Japan in 2000, if you're on GR, Merry Christmas!

RECOMMENDED

Jessi says

Holidays on Ice is great right down to the cover which features an alcoholic beverage with ice in it (adorable and much like my family's holidays). It features Christmas themed stories some his holiday experiences, others just featuring his talent as a writer. Santa land Diaries is the first essay and it is the star of this show. These are journal entries from when David at the age of 33 worked as an elf at Macy's Santaland...at the age of 33.

It chronicles the insane parents, the unfortunate children, an interesting and multi-cultural array of Santa's and the policies Macy's enforces with regard to Santaland. There is so much gold here it is unreal, a Santa who never breaks character (he is called Santa Santa) there is a gay elf (snowball) who leads all the other gay elves and a Santa on, there is a designated corner for children to vomit in, I could go on.

One of my fav bits

"The back hallway was jammed with people. There was a line for Santa and a line for the women's bathroom, and one woman, after asking me a thousand questions already asked, which is the line for the women's bathroom? And I shouted that I thought it was the line with all the women in it. And she said, I'm going to have you fired. I had two people say that to me today, I'm going to have you fired. Go ahead, be my guest.

I'm wearing a green velvet costume. It doesn't get any worse than this. Who do these people think they are? I'm going to have you fired, and I want to lean over, and say I'm going to have you killed."

Isn't he great!

If you don't love Sedaris you may not enjoy the rest of the collection Santaland by far outshines the rest. I listen to the audio version which features Sedaris himself reading, I enjoy listening to him so much more than reading it, he brings that extra something.

At one point in Santaland Diaries "Santa" Santa demands that David sing "Away in A Manger" at first David claims not to know but when pushed by "Santa" Santa he decides to sing it as Billie Holliday would have sung it, then we are treated to this rendition which causes my dog EverlyBrothers to start howling as if he was singing with him,

it was like in 101 Dalmations when they used the friggen Twilight Bark for trying to find the puppies, anyway I found this made it even funnier, my neighbors maybe not. But I think David Sedaris would have got a chuckle from it.

Ellen says

My mother was a little crazy.

She saw people looking through our windows, heard them whispering under our porch, spotted private family conversations in the newspaper, unexpectedly screamed profanity at people who looked suspicious (sometimes while we were in a restaurant or some other very public location), and thought the writing on trucks and other vehicles that passed us on the road were coded messages just for her. ... It was a bit creepy.

My father didn't help. Rather than acknowledging my mother was crazy (she had paranoid schizophrenia, which I didn't know until my late teens), he said she was "nervous." This verdict suggested her visions were normal, and to my young mind, validated the notion that there were indeed people peeking into the house. It made me rather skittish.

However, as a bright side to my mother's fickle mental state, she was brilliant and often savagely funny when lucid. Form letters—letters sent at Christmas generally boasting of a family's all-around success and wholesomeness—were targets of particular glee. My mother would read these saccharine missives with just the right amount of over-the-top chirpiness, and then would compose her own, much darker, Christmas form

letter about our family. For example, “Last summer, mother was institutionalized again at Grover’s Sanitarium. It is a lovely tree-lined facility, and who can forget the shock treatments!? Whee!!!” We had a highly evolved sense of humor. However, even in her darkest moments, I doubt my mother could have matched David Sedaris’ send-up of form letters in his essay, “Season’s Greetings to Our Friends and Family!!!!”

Humor has always been about pushing the envelope. How far can you stretch humor before it tips over the edge and becomes disturbing? There’s no clear answer. I had a friend once comment vigorously, “You think the movie *Fargo* is funny? That’s *not* a funny movie!” Well sorry. I think it is. But humor is also deeply idiosyncratic. In Sedaris’s mock form letter, and this is not much of a spoiler given that you know something truly amiss is going on with the Dunbar family early on, the baby grandson is found—lifeless—in the dryer, having died while in the washing machine (but mercifully and most certainly, our letter writer assures us, before the spin cycle)... It’s not an essay that would appeal to everyone.

I doubt few would debate the humor of Sedaris’ classic “Santaland Diaries” or “Jesus Shaves,” which also appears in his collection *Me Speak Pretty One Day*. Yesterday, I was trying to describe and then read a couple of short excerpts from the latter essay, when I found a YouTube clip of Sedaris reading the essay. Humor is wickedly difficult to write; you’re confined to prose to convey the pacing and intonation comedy requires. And then there’s Sedaris’ voice, slightly nasal, droll, and deliciously snarky. When my husband *heard* the essay, read by Sedaris, he laughed so hard he had tears running down his cheeks.

“The Cow and the Turkey” is another wonderfully funny essay, slightly reminiscent of James Thurber’s wild fables. There’s no way to convey its humor adequately. Just think of a barnyard, the problems being a Secret Santa might pose for the animals, and a very sinister cow. My mother was that cow, and yes, Moira, I know this has Faulknerian echoes:

“My mother is a fish.”

Jason Koivu says

Holidays on Ice puts David Sedaris on ice. Why? Because, aside from one inclusion, this is a collection of short fiction, where as when Sedaris is riffing on real life in his autobio journal work, the man is on fire!

David Sedaris is best listened to rather than read, in my opinion. I always go the audiobook route with him, because he narrates them himself, adding in all the oh-so-necessary inflection, as well as some hilarious renditions of his parents and, one of my favorites, Billie Holiday. But here too is an issue. Some of these shorts are not read by him, but rather by guest narrators. That's like casting Rip Torn as the evil-yet-somehow-handsome villain in your movie...

...and then replacing him with Rip Taylor, because you thought it would liven things up.

Just one last gripe. At least two of the half dozen-ish stories in *Holidays on Ice* actually appeared in previous publications, so this shit ain't even fresh!

Go take a listen to *Me Talk Pretty One Day*, *Dress Your Family Up in Corduroy and Denim* or *When You Are Engulfed In Flames*. They're non-fiction (well...with a bit of hyperbole thrown in for fun) pieces about his life and they are comedy gold.

Rating: The short non-fiction piece "The Santa Land Diaries" is of 4 star quality, but the rest drags it down a notch.

?Susan? says

I guess my funny bone is broken or I'm not drunk enough, because after the first story I could not hardly stomach the rest of the stories. My first one star rating. If you are looking for a dark Christmas comedy, "The Stupidest Angel", was in my opinion, head and shoulders better than this mess.

Matthew says

2.5 to 3 stars - rounded up to 3 on the official rating to give Sedaris the benefit of the doubt.

I did not enjoy this quite as much as previous Sedaris titles I have read. While it contained the cynicism I have come to expect from him, it seemed to overpower the humor a lot more than usual. So, instead of being amused, I was left feeling uncomfortable.

Also, since this is a much shorter compilation of holiday related stories, it did not have the full satisfaction of one of his full length books with all original material. (Note: I say "holiday related" in the previous sentence, but there is one story in here about cadavers that I was not quite sure how it related to holidays).

If you are a die hard Sedaris fan, check it out. If you are just starting with Sedaris, there are much better places to begin. (When You Are Engulfed in Flames, Let's Explore Diabetes with Owls, Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim)
